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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 001336

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TAGS: PREL PGOV ASEC HA

SUBJECT: GOH AND MINUSTAH PREPARE TO TAKE ON GANGS; MANUEL PROMISES "SKY WILL FALL" IF KIDNAPPED VICTIMS NOT RELEASED

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 1316

Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason 1.5(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Although July 21 has been quiet, these days of violence along Airport Road have prompted President Preval to invite MINUSTAH to take firm military action against the gangs. But Preval refuses to go public with this request and is reluctant to authorize MINUSTAH to go into the heart of Cite Soleil to root out the problem. SRSG Mulet is confident he has robust rules of engagement to take on this task. Preval confident Bob Manuel meanwhile has made indirect contact with gang leaders in Cite Soleil to insist on the release of all kidnap victims. Preval appears to be taking the security threat seriously, but we still await decisive action and forceful public leadership on his part. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Haitian and UN officials have told us that President Preval has agreed to allow MINUSTAH and the HNP to target the gangs in a bid to end the violence which has marked the capital during the past week. Prime Minister Alexis will speak to the Haitian people tonight (Friday) to attempt to calm the situation. These steps follow three days of violence along airport road (Avenue Toussaint L'Overture) and near the adjacent Industrial Zone. According to press reports and MINUSTAH information, small groups of armed men fired shots in and around the vicinity, wounding some passers-by. Businesses and markets shut down, traffic ceased, and the streets were deserted, according to businessmen in the area. The airport remained open and operational during the period, according to MINUSTAH. There were no reports of shooting along Airport Road July 21, although the area remains tense.

¶3. (C) Preval's chief advisor Bob Manuel told Ambassador Friday morning that, at the President's direction, he has made contact with the gangs in Cite Soleil. Using a "good intermediary" who he would not name, he told the gang leaders that they must immediately release all kidnap victims and lay down their arms. If they did not do so, "the sky would fall on their heads." He claims that the gangs are demanding to "talk" about their grievances. Preval (via Manuel) has rejected any "negotiations" until all kidnap victims are released. Manuel stressed that the GOH will not/not negotiate, talk or parley until these conditions are met. Asked why he thinks that the gangs will agree, he said that if not, MINUSTAH will go after them. That message has been passed -- and he believes -- received.

¶4. (C) Manuel said that he has been told that the kidnappers evidently had not realized that they had seized an Embassy FSN on Tuesday in their most recent kidnapping spree. He

reports that they are nervous about the consequences of such a step and have told Manuel's intermediary that they left the Embassy vehicle in which the FSN was traveling on Route National 1 outside Cite Soleil as a good faith gesture. Manuel said he demanded that the employee and other victims be released immediately. (Subsequent to this conversation, Manuel called Ambassador to say he understood our employee had been released. Shortly thereafter, he returned safely to the Embassy compound.)

¶ 15. (C) UN SRSG Edmond Mulet told Ambassador Thursday night that Preval was willing to let MINUSTAH deal with the violence along Airport Road although he was less sanguine than Manuel that the government wants to take decisive action. The two, Mulet and Preval, are now meeting every day to discuss the situation. The president, Mulet said, is indeed angry; he believes that this wave of violence is a deliberate attempt to embarrass his administration on the eve of the July 25 Donors Conference. However, despite the MINUSTAH chief's repeated prodding, Preval remains reluctant to go public with his decision to authorize MINUSTAH to deal with the violence. Mulet says, "he wants us to take the fall" if things do badly. Nor is Preval yet ready to authorize MINUSTAH to go into Cite Soleil, the slum at the heart of the problem, and disarm the gangs there. Mulet acknowledged that absent a decision to deal with the gangs' safehaven, any MINUSTAH effort would simply be a holding exercise. He said that he sought and has now received UN headquarters approval to move beyond MINUSTAH's original ROE which permit his troops to act only when they observe a crime being committed. Arguing that the role of MINUSTAH is to help stabilize the country, he has gotten DPKO and the UN lawyers to now agree that MINUSTAH may stop and disarm any individuals carrying weapons, as they are potentially a destabilizing element. The SRSG sees this as a positive step

and clearly intends to be elastic in his application of the ROEs, should Preval agree. As of July 20, UN planners had developed courses of action for raiding suspected homes where kidnap victims are held.

¶ 16. (C) Officials, including the Ministers of Justice and Interior, have told Ambassador that Preval is determined to act to end the violence and that he has a plan to do so. Manuel hinted to Ambassador that the president is dangling the carrot of face to face meetings with "3 to 4 of the big guys" in the gangs once the violence and the kidnapping subside, but the presidential advisor refused to be more specific, preferring to discuss the matter later. Meanwhile the citizenry is restive: local business leaders are calling for a day long strike demanding immediate action to improve security while others have urged restraint, arguing that it is better to press Preval privately than criticize him in public.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: It has become clear over the past several days that Preval is finally seized with the urgency of addressing the security problem in Port-au-Prince. Yet his reluctance to give public endorsement to forceful MINUSTAH action in Cite Soleil -- the heart of the gang problem -- suggests he has not yet mustered all the necessary fire in the belly. End Comment.

SANDERSON